

# Excerpts from "The Odyssey"

## *Odysseus and Elpenor in the Underworld*

### **Summary:**

After leaving the island home of Circe, Odysseus went to the Underworld, the kingdom of the dead. There, he sought advice from the prophet Tiresias on how to get home safely. First, Odysseus sacrifices two calves so the dead will speak with him. While Odysseus waited for the prophet, his shipmate Elpenor appeared. Elpenor had been killed on Circe's island, and pled with his friend Odysseus to give him a proper burial.

### **Excerpt:**

But first the ghost of Elpenor, my companion, came toward me.

He'd not been buried under the wide ways of earth,  
not yet, we'd left his body in Circe's house,  
unwept, unburied—this other labor pressed us.

But I wept to see him now, pity touched my heart  
and I called out a winged word to him there: "Elpenor,  
how did you ravel down to the world of darkness?  
Faster on foot, I see, than I in my black ship."

... "My lord, remember me, I beg you! Don't sail off  
and desert me, left behind unwept, unburied, don't,  
or my curse may draw God's fury on your hear.  
...Perform my rites, and plant on my tomb that oar  
I swung with mates when I rowed among the living."

"All this, my unlucky friend," I reassured him,  
"I will do for you. I won't forget a thing."